

*United States Marine Corps
School of Advanced Warfighting
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
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THE BABY WITH THE BATH WATER:
MANAGING THE EVOLUTION OF EXPEDITIONARY
NAVAL FORCES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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AUTHOR:

MAJOR FARRELL J. SULLIVAN, USMC

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Mentor: LtCol Christopher Woodbridge

Approved: _____

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Executive Summary

Title: The Evolution of Expeditionary Naval Forces in the 21st Century

Author: Major Farrell Sullivan, United States Marine Corps

Thesis: In order to meet the needs of the Regional Combatant Commanders in the 21st Century, the Marine Corps must consider breaking the current MEU paradigm in favor of more tailored and mission focused expeditionary forces.

Discussion: Analysis of the future security environment suggests the following trends: surprise will occur, so the issue is how to mitigate its effects; the maritime domain and littorals will remain critical to any future stability; instability is likely to occur where a nexus exists between poverty, extremism, nationalism, oppression, natural disaster, etc.; future threats will include smaller-scale contingencies and counterinsurgency as well as peer or near peer state-based forces; terrorist groups and networks will operate to disrupt regional/global stability; the Middle East, South Asia, the Pacific Rim, Africa, and Latin/South America are areas likely to see increased instability in the future which are accessible to expeditionary naval forces.

Based on the GCC requirements for distributed, regionally focused, forward based forces capable of a wide array of missions ranging from security cooperation, to humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, to combat it is likely that the current composition and employment of MEUs will be inadequate to cover the increasingly diverse mission sets required.

Conclusion: While the concepts of the GFS and the SCMAGTF do not completely overlay the MEU, there are striking similarities. The role of amphibious shipping as well as the training necessary to build the cohesive Navy-Marine Corps team required to carry out the missions described are two major parallels between these new concepts and the proven capability of the MEU. With some modification, perhaps a more adaptive MEU would be more appropriate for the future security environment described in the new maritime strategy. MEUs should be tailored to the needs of the GCC in the following ways: tailored ARGs; additional MEUs; varying lengths of deployment; task organized, trained, and equipped based on the requirements of the GCC.

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Table of Contents

	Page
DISCLAIMER	ii
INTRODUCTION	
SECTION 1: FUTURE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT	
SECTION 2: COMBATANT COMMANDER’S REQUIRMENTS	
SECTION 3: MARITIME STRATEGY	
SECTION 4: THE PARADIGM	
SECTION 5: BREAKING THE PARADIGM	
CONCLUSION	
BIBLIOGRAPHY	
APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS	
APPENDIX B: MEU MISSION ESSENTIAL TASK LIST	

"I think the ARG concept with a MEU (SOC) embarked meets our needs today, but we will need a different capability in 2005 and 2010, when we are trying to protect our national interests in the littorals of places like the Indian and Pacific Oceans...each [amphibious ship] might have 'one mini-MEU (SOC)' on board, so that they can cover the vast distances that we will be required to oversee."

-- General Krulak (1996)¹

¹Tom Clancy, *Marine: A Guided Tour of a Marine Expeditionary Unit*, (Berkley Publishing, 1996), p. 39.

Introduction

Since 1776, the United States has gradually increased its capability to engage and influence foreign entities globally. Subject to prevailing domestic political sentiments ranging from engagement to isolationism, the United States' gradual increase in this capability has taken many forms ranging from the establishment of diplomatic missions, to the building of economic and security alliances, to military intervention. In the early 1930's, Captain Harry Ellsworth, the officer-in-charge of the Marine Corps Historical Section, documented what he described as the Corps most important, yet least documented duty. This duty went beyond the credible and efficient role Marines played in actual conventional warfare, Ellsworth was referring to the role Marines played in the rendering of able assistance to their Country's diplomatic representatives in establishing and maintaining foreign policies.² From 1800 - 1934, the United States Marine Corps made no less than 180 landings on foreign shores spanning the globe from South America to the Far East. According to Ellsworth, Marines landed on foreign shores for one of four main reasons: (1) political intervention, (2) punitive action, (3) protection of diplomatic missions to include people and property, and finally, for (4) humanitarian reasons.³

The U.S. has employed its naval expeditionary capabilities in 101 instances since 1982 in order to reassure friends and deter/defeat potential enemies.⁴ 88 of those 101 instances conformed to doctrinal types of amphibious operations and the remaining 13 instances were classified as "such other duties as the President or the Secretary of Defense may direct." Of the 88 that conformed to doctrinal description, 73 were classified as "Other Amphibious Operations" such as non-combatant evacuation (NEO) and humanitarian assistance (HA) as well as disaster

²Harry Allanson Ellsworth, *One Hundred Eighty Landings of United States Marines 1800-1934*, (GPO, 1974), p. Foreword.

³ Ibid, p. V.

⁴ This analysis was extracted from a PowerPoint brief titled "How we Fight." The data and brief were the products of the Concepts and Plans Division, MCWL, MCCDC.

relief (DR). All but four of the instances analyzed occurred in the littorals stretching from South East Asia, through the Middle East and Africa, to Latin America and the Caribbean.

History suggests that the employment of expeditionary naval force is an important means of safeguarding our national interests and will likely remain so. However, an appreciation of history alone is not enough. Attempting to understand what the future may hold in store, though elusive, is equally as important. The United States' most recent strategic guidance documents and threat estimates indicate that forward presence and engagement will be important facets in safeguarding our national security interests in the future. *The National Defense Strategy 2005* emphasizes "the importance of influencing events before challenges become more dangerous and less manageable." *The Naval Operating Concept 2006* nests with the NDS and calls for "more widely distributed forces to provide increased forward presence, security cooperation with an expanding set of international partners, preemption of non-traditional threats, and global response to crises in regions around the world where access might be difficult."⁵

The Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), "the crown jewel of the Marine Corps", remains a relevant tool to the Geographic Combatant Commander (GCC). However, the MEU is a "pre-9/11" construct that needs to evolve to meet the future demands of the GCC. Based on the GCC requirements for distributed, regionally focused, forward based forces capable of a wide array of missions ranging from security cooperation, to humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, to combat it is likely that the current composition and employment of MEUs will be inadequate to cover the increasingly diverse mission sets required. In order to meet the needs of the Geographic Combatant Commanders in the 21st Century, the Marine Corps must consider breaking the current MEU paradigm in favor of more tailored and mission focused expeditionary forces.

⁵Gen Michael Hagee USMC, and Adm Michael Mullen, USN, *Naval Operations Concept 2006*, (Washington, DC: Dept. of the Navy, September 2006), p. 1.

The Future Security Environment

Studying the future requires one to conceptualize a future security environment. This analysis of the future is not a search for certainty for the future is inherently unpredictable, and becomes even more so the farther you peer into it. The purpose of questioning what the future may hold is to gather the most likely characteristics of the future security environment in a narrative or model that includes an awareness of dissenting viewpoints and plausible wild cards. The goal is not perfection but to be more right than wrong. It is not a question of whether surprise will occur but to what extent it will occur.

Though the nature of war is enduring, there are characteristics and contexts of war that are constantly evolving. With the demise of the Soviet Union and the associated bi-polar security environment, patterns and trends of what is to come have emerged. Due to globalization and the growing interconnectedness of the world economy, the vital interests of the United States are increasingly coupled with those of other nations regardless of geographic proximity. A relatively peaceful global system is in the national interests of the U.S. The maritime domain, including the littorals, is a key aspect of the global system. Water covers three-quarters of the earth's surface over which 90% of global exports and 66% of its petroleum pass each year.⁶ In addition, the vast majority of the world's populace and urban centers exist within the littorals. It seems relatively clear that the maritime domain will remain critically important to U.S. national security and global prosperity.

The dissolution of the old bi-polar security arrangement combined with the impacts of globalization indicate trends that suggests instability will continue to be a growing trend in

⁶ Adm Thad Allen, USCG; Adm Michael G. Mullen, USN; and Gen Michael W. Hagee, USMC. *Maritime Strategy: A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*. (Department of the Navy, October 2007), p. 2.

Middle East, South Asia, Africa, the Pacific Rim and South America. Disparity in the distribution of prosperity coupled with demands for limited resources will continue to create competition among state and non-state actors that will likely lead to claims of sovereignty, control, or access that can result in conflict. The uneven distribution of wealth, often a combination of globalization and government corruption, will lead to increased dissatisfaction or disenfranchisement among those who are poverty stricken, living in areas prone to natural disasters, struggling under the yoke of repressive regimes, denied their human rights, adhering to religious/ideological extremism, seeking ethnic nationalism, or desiring sanctuary from the expanding tide of western influence. These circumstances call for forward deployed, expeditionary naval forces capable of a wide array of mission sets ranging from security cooperation to HA/DR to stability operations.

Many national security experts claim that, a large, conventional, state-based military confrontation is not likely to occur between the United States and a peer or near-peer competitor in the foreseeable future. These claims are fraught with problems as they over-simplify the nature of war and misjudge the degree to which one can reasonably predict future events. While the likelihood of smaller scale contingencies, counterinsurgency, and counter terrorism may have risen, the potential for state-based conflict is alive and well. To those who predict that the world has seen the end of state vs. state warfare, even in the short-term, Colin Gray suggests that such a transformation has not occurred in nearly three millennia of history variably accessible to our inspection: why should it happen now?⁷ Recent conventional wisdom rightly suggests that approaches taken to ameliorate the conditions that result in smaller-scale contingencies and counterinsurgency are not “lesser-included offenses” to large scale, state based military confrontation. While empirical evidence supports this contention, the approach taken to solve

⁷ Gray, Colin S., *Another Bloody Century: Future War*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2005), p.20.

the problems associated with small-scale contingencies and state based military confrontation share some common capability sets required in execution. Our current and future adversaries will likely attempt to avoid our strengths and adopt approaches that attempt to exploit our weaknesses. These threats will not be easy to categorize into simple classifications like irregular, traditional, catastrophic, or disruptive. It is likely that state and non-state actors together or in isolation will employ a complex combination of approaches where the distinction between the approaches is blurred. This implies that naval expeditionary forces, while requiring some special capabilities, will be well served to be general purpose and thus applicable to a wide array of potential missions.

The *Marine Corps Midrange Threat Estimate: 2005-2015* provides insights into the causes, locations, and potential adversaries in future conflicts. The growing trend toward violent, transnational extremism is deemed the most significant destabilizing factor in many parts of the world today. The most predominant form of transnational extremism that exists today and will likely exist in the future is that of “Islamic-totalitarian” extremists as typified by Al Qaeda. It is important to distinguish between local/regional terror organizations or networks and that of the transnational kind. Al Qaeda is a loosely coupled organization with groups affiliated to varying degrees or not at all. Not all extremist groups share the goals of Al Qaeda and many are driven by local grievances as opposed to Al Qaeda’s global grievances. This means that in addition to providing security cooperation assistance, forward deployed naval forces should be capable of supporting direct action against these terrorist networks.

In the general description of the future security environment, there are specific regions of particular importance to naval forces. The Middle East and South Asia lay at the center of “Islamic-totalitarian” movements who create instability in their attempts to undermine western

influence in the region and globally. This situation is exacerbated by the rise of Iran as the dominant regional power to the dismay of the other nation-states within the region. The Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf provide access and shipping lanes critical to the global economy. Within the Pacific, many nations view the U.S. presence as the only credible counterbalance to the rise of China. Africa is a continent in turmoil as many weak and fragile governments deal with modernization and globalization as well as an increase in Chinese influence. Latin and South America suffer from a combustible blend of poverty, crime, despair, corruption, resentment, and anti-democratic sentiment. In addition, Latin and South America possess more than a few weak governments that fail to provide security, justice, and basic services to the people, which will increasingly lead to instability and crisis in the future.

Analysis of the future security environment suggests the following trends: surprise will occur, so the issue is how to mitigate its effects; the maritime domain and littorals will remain critical to any future stability; instability is likely to occur where a nexus exists between poverty, extremism, nationalism, oppression, natural disaster, etc.; future threats will include smaller-scale contingencies and counterinsurgency as well as peer or near peer state-based forces; terrorist groups and networks will operate to disrupt regional/global stability; the Middle East, South Asia, the Pacific Rim, Africa, and Latin/South America are areas likely to see increased instability in the future which are accessible to expeditionary naval forces.

Combatant Commander's Requirements

The naval services are organized, trained, and equipped based on several factors that include strategic/conceptual guidance as well as the demands of the GCC. Before addressing how naval strategy influences the evolution of expeditionary naval forces, it is necessary to

consider the requirements of the GCCs as they are more closely connected to the unique realities of the current and future demands of each theater. This limited analysis of the GCCs requirements divides them into two categories, those that are unique to each theater and those that are common to every theater.

The actual requirements of the GCCs are classified and therefore will not be outlined in this study. Regardless, much can be deduced from open source information about each theater. A brief comparison of the Pacific and African theaters will serve to highlight that each theater is unique enough to require something different in the make-up and capabilities of the forward deployed expeditionary forces it receives. For example, the Pacific is geographically the largest theater. It is subject to weather patterns and geological composition that makes it historically prone to natural disasters. It is a theater in which engagement with allies and partner nations is extensive. Significant internal unrest exists in several of the more influential states in the region (i.e. Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand). Finally, it is a theater possessing two major war plans, which include North Korea and Taiwan respectively. Africa on the other hand is a developing theater with instability and conflict materializing due to competition over resources, ethnic/religious extremism, government corruption, etc. While both theaters have to face the prospect of local and regional unrest, differences abound. The Pacific is a massive maritime area in which natural disasters and significant regional engagement responsibilities are extensive as is the need to be poised to commit forward deployed forces to potential war-plans; whereas Africa is a less developed theater with great potential for forward deployed forces capable of conducting security cooperation, non-combatant evacuation, security, and small scale combat missions.

While each theater is unique, there are aspects of the GCC requirements that are common. A study recently published by the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA) summarized the future requirements of the combatant commander's as follows⁸:

- Operate from “global commons,” to include using the sea as maneuver space
- Task-organized, joint forces capable of confronting a number of different mission sets with the same force
- Mobile, light, and expeditionary forces capable of distributing throughout a theater
- C2 and ISR capabilities tailored to distributed operations
- Forces capable of providing the persistent presence required to conduct security cooperation, engagement, and counterinsurgency operations
- Forces that can reassemble quickly in order to conduct conventional combat operations while being reinforced from the rear

Maritime Strategy

The New Maritime Strategy

A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower, the U.S.'s new joint maritime strategy, reflects the previous 25 years of conceptual development and recognizes the increasingly interdependent global network and its susceptibility to major power war, regional conflict, terrorism, lawlessness, and natural disaster. A major premise of the strategy is that preventing wars is as important as winning wars,⁹ which has significant implications in terms of forward presence and peacetime engagement.

The strategy outlines six strategic imperatives that form the core of this maritime concept. The first three imperatives¹⁰ deal with regionally concentrated maritime combat forces continuously postured in the Western Pacific and Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean. The remaining

⁸ Thomas A. Bowditch, and Laura E. L. McGuckin,, *The MEU for the Long War*, (Alexandria, Va: CNA, Jan 2007), p. 30.

⁹ Hagee and Mullins, p.15

¹⁰ The first three imperatives of the new Maritime Strategy are: (1) to limit regional conflict with forward deployed forces; (2) deter major power war; (3) win our nation's wars.

three imperatives¹¹ deal with globally distributed and mission tailored maritime forces that will extend their focus beyond traditional deployment areas to include Africa and the Western Hemisphere. In addition, these distributed forces must be tailored to the specific requirements of the geographic region in which they will be employed and includes mission sets with increased emphasis on humanitarian assistance, counter-terrorism and irregular warfare.

Implementing the Strategy

Due to the conceptual nature of strategic documents, there is often room for interpretation regarding implementation. This is the case with the new maritime strategy as the Navy and Marine Corps pursue the development of adaptive force packages tailored to meet the demands of the combatant commanders in the form of Global Fleet Stations (GFS) and the Security Cooperation Marine Air Ground Task Forces (SCMAGTF) respectfully. These initial attempts at interpreting the strategy will likely evolve and more mature forms of adaptive force packaging will emerge. Initially though, both the GFS and the SCMAGTF resemble the MEU which may be an indicator of the approach the naval services should be pursuing.

The Global Fleet Station concept is central to both the NOC06 and the new maritime strategy. The NOC06 describes the GFS as follows:

GFS is a persistent sea base of operations from which to coordinate and employ adaptive force packages within a regional area of interest. Focusing primarily on Phase 0 (shaping) operations, Theater Security Cooperation, Global Maritime Awareness, and tasks associated specifically with the War on Terror, GFS offers a means to increase regional maritime security.¹²

The NOC06 goes on to describe, in a vignette, forces from GFS conducting raids and maritime

¹¹ The remaining imperatives from the new Maritime Strategy are: (4) contribute to homeland defense in depth; (5) foster and sustain cooperative relationships with more international partners; (6) prevent or contain local disruptions before they affect the global system.

¹² Hagee and Mullins, p.30.

special purpose missions against terrorist camps and support facilities in a fictitious littoral country. Another document, published by the U.S. Navy describes the GFS as a base from which tailored and adaptive force packages can be launched in response to humanitarian crises, natural disasters, and terrorist activity.¹³ Seabased operations consisting of raids, responses to HA/DR normally, and the ability to engage friends and allies are what today one typically associates with the MEU.

In late 2007, the Marine Corps published its concept for dealing with the future security environment titled *Send in the Marines*. In this document the SCMAGTF is describe as being:

Similar to a MEU, but task organized for civil-military operations and security cooperation, the SC MAGTF will have capability, mobility, and sustainability capacity commensurate with its requirements to provide training to less developed military forces.¹⁴

Send in the Marines goes on to describe the SCMAGTF as an operational reconnaissance asset as well as an asset available for assisting in the development of civil society in ungoverned and under-governed spaces, denying sanctuary to an enemy, conducting operational preparation of the environment, waging ideological warfare, and interdicting terrorists and other irregular enemies.¹⁵ Like the GFS, the SCMAGTF begins to look a lot like the MEU considering the functional support (i.e. C2, ISR, mobility, fires, etc.) that will be required to carry out the missions envisioned. In addition, the similarities between the SCMAGTF and the MEU are evidenced by the concepts description of the SCMAGTF when it is described as a combined arms, expeditionary, and full-spectrum combat force.¹⁶ This resemblance to the MEU is further highlighted in the following excerpt from the concept:

In the event of crisis, the theater MARFORs will possess the ability to rapidly assemble the distributed SC MAGTF assets to provide a

¹³ *White Paper on Global Fleet Stations*, (Washington DC, Department of the Navy, March 2006).

¹⁴ Conway, Gen. James T. USMC, *Send in the Marines*, (Washington DC: HQMC, 2007).

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.21.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.20.

scalable, tailored capability able to meet the CCDRs security requirements. From local crises such as a NEO or a humanitarian situation to major combat operations (MCO) in other CCDR AORs, the forward deployed SC MAGTF will constitute an initial capability to respond to tasking and if required rapidly assimilate additional forces or capabilities to stabilize the situation.¹⁷

While the concepts of the GFS and the SCMAGTF do not completely overlay the MEU, there are striking similarities. The role of amphibious shipping as well as the training necessary to build the cohesive Navy-Marine Corps team required to carry out the missions described are two major parallels between these new concepts and the proven capability of the MEU. With some modification, perhaps a more adaptive MEU would be more appropriate for the future security environment described in the new maritime strategy.

The Paradigm

The MEU Paradigm in Question

The mission of the MEU is to “provide a forward-deployed, flexible, seabased Marine Air Ground Task Force capable of rapidly executing amphibious operations, designated maritime special operations, military operations other than war, and supporting operations to include enabling the introduction of follow-on-forces.”¹⁸ Based on its mission essential task list¹⁹ as well as its historically documented performance the MEU has, in the past, met the needs of the combatant commanders. However, as the U.S. military transitions from the current security environment to a future beyond operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, it will be necessary to break the existing MEU paradigm to make future naval expeditionary forces continually relevant to the combatant commanders.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.22.

¹⁸ Marine Corps Order 3120.9B

¹⁹ The 23 missions essential tasks for the MEU are listed in Annex A.

Forward deployed Marine expeditionary forces have proven to be a tool that GCCs understand and do not hesitate to use. Based on the success of the MEU a paradigm has emerged that is only partly in concert with the requirements of the future security environment, the strategic guidance, and the combatant commanders. This paradigm is summarized in the following characteristics:

- Deploys its assets on three amphibious ships: LHD or LHA, LSD, LPD
- Deploys for six to seven months
- A fixed task organization that is only modified on the edges
- Trained and equipped to a relatively fixed set of mission essential tasks

The amphibious ready group (ARG)²⁰, though capable of operating in a “split” mode does not represent a force capable of distributing across a theater while retaining the ability to command and control offensive operations and conduct ISR. While split-ARG operations work when supporting training exercises limitations exist in when faced with long-term, distributed, complex operations.

MEUs traditionally deploy for six to seven months of which several weeks/months are spent in transit. This transit time shortens the forces presence in any given theater. This limited presence can be scheduled in such a way as to support planned exercises, but the question is whether this will meet the future requirements outlined by the combatant commanders for persistent presence in support of security cooperation and engagement.

By definition, a MEU is a MAGTF and is considered task-organized to meet the operational requirements of a specific mission. While the MEU task-organization has at times been modified, these modifications have not been significant. Examples of these minor modifications

²⁰ Normally consists of three amphibious ships to include an LHA or LHD, LPD, and LSD.

include the addition or subtraction of assets like helicopters, artillery, tanks, LAVs, etc. But the fundamentals of the task organization have remained largely unchanged, and thus not task organized to the specific needs of the GCCs.

The mission essential task list of the MEU has also remained relatively unchanged. While it has been modified around the edges most MEUs deploy trained to execute the mission essential task list.

Breaking the Paradigm

These types of Marine forces should retain the title of Marine Expeditionary Unit, as it is a known quantity to the GCC and the recommended modifications are evolutionary as opposed to an alternative or additional MAGTF. The major adjustments to the current Marine Corps expeditionary capability listed below will be treated independently:

- Tailored ARGs
- Additional MEUs
- Varying lengths of deployment
- Task organized, trained, and equipped based on the requirements of the GCC

Tailored ARGs

Over time, the size and composition of the Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) has evolved and since the early 1990s it has been reduced in size as the stable of amphibious lift has decreased. In recent history, Amphibious Ready Groups, regardless of the theatre, consist of three ships: an LHD/LHA, an LPD, and an LSD. This is driven by the real world constraints of resource programming and personnel stability and not the unique requirements of each theater. This mix

of ships has proven capable of split-ARG operations where the ships split in order to meet multiple demands of a particular nature. The capabilities resident within and on board these ships drive the split which has often taken the form of the LHD/LHA and LSD remaining together while the LPD conducted operations independently.²¹ The LPD is capable of limited duration independent operations because of its command and control capability, its well-deck, its flight deck, etc. More often than not, this type of split occurs to support more benign missions like training exercises or HA/DR operations. But split-ARG operations, using the current mix of ships, limits the capability of the MEU when faced with larger or more complex operations like a raid, large scale disaster relief, or tactical recovery of aircraft and personal. The limitations of the current ARG result from the strain placed on the functional capabilities of the MEU, which are dissipated when the ships are no longer in range to mutually support each other.

In the future, tailorable ARGs would provide a more flexible capability to a GCC. One theater might be better suited by having a four ship ARG consisting of an LHD/LHA, two LPDs, and an LSD. This would provide a GCC the capability to spread load the functional capabilities of the MEU to deal with multiple demands in a distributed fashion with independent seabased forces that would re-aggregate as circumstances allowed. Tailoring an ARG would not always mean beefing it up with additional ships. It might also mean reducing the number of ships required to support the demands of a particular GCC for a determined amount of time based on a study of the potential future demands of that particular theater. It might only require a two-ship ARG or two, one-ship ARGs based on analyzing the theater security cooperation plan, seasonal weather patterns, etc.

Central to this idea of the ARG are the amphibious ships. Though designed for conducting amphibious assaults, these ships provide unique flexibility to conduct C2, project and sustain

²¹ Bowditch and McGuckin, p.73

forces ashore, operate in hostile waters, remain in station for extended periods, etc. The initial and limited objective GFS deployments deployed with a mix of mostly non-amphibious ships, like the high-speed vessel and submarine tender, which do not possess the capability to support the GFS operations envisioned in the concept. This is not to say that a high-speed vessel (HSV), hospital ship, or military sealift command (MSC) ship would be an unwelcomed addition to the ARG. These types of ships could be a force multiplier for MEU/ARG operations but they do not possess the inherent flexibility provided by an amphib.

Additional MEU

The new maritime strategy outlines four regional priority areas for the lay-down of forward deployed forces. These areas include the Western Pacific, Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean, Africa, and the Western Hemisphere. The strategy calls for regionally concentrated, credible combat forces in order to *limit regional conflict, deter major power war, and win our nation's wars* with priority going to the Western Pacific and Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean. Implied in this is the need for these regionally concentrated, credible combat forces to be able to respond to a wider range of engagements and contingencies.

In addition the strategy calls for globally distributed and mission tailored maritime forces in order to *contribute to homeland defense in depth, foster and sustain cooperative relationships with more international partners, and prevent or contain local disruptions before they affect the global system* with priority going to Africa and the Western Hemisphere. While these forces would be less likely to be employed to deter regional conflict or major power war they would require some limited yet credible combat capability in addition to the ability to conduct humanitarian relief.

While current thinking among the staffs of the Navy and Marine Corps view the solution to these strategic imperatives and regional priorities in the GFS and SCMAGTF, a strong argument can be made that a modified MEU would provide a solution more in line with the demand of the GCC for flexible, multi-role forward deployed forces. Currently the Marine Corps forward deploys three MEUs at any one time, though the MEU stationed in Okinawa is arguably less capable than the CONUS based MEUs. The new paradigm would include the addition of at least one additional MEU and a focus on the following regional areas: West African Coast/Western Hemisphere; East African Coast/Mediterranean; Western Pacific; Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean. In line with the current maritime strategy, the forward deployed, expeditionary forces associated with the Western Pacific and Arabian Gulf/Indian Ocean would be multi-role forces but weighted for the increased potential to be required to participate in regional conflict or war. The forces associated with Africa, the Mediterranean, and the Western Hemisphere would also be multi-role forces but weighted for the increased potential to participate in engagement, small-scale contingencies, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief.

Varying Lengths of Deployment

In the past, forward deployed expeditionary forces have engaged with allies and partner nations in a host of different ways ranging from joint exercises to training exchanges. It is reasonable to expect that each GCC will require forward deployed expeditionary forces capable of providing the persistent presence required to conduct theater security cooperation, engagement, and the other time intensive tasks related to bolstering the capabilities of our allies and partner nations. Building the types of relationships necessary to make these types of missions successful takes time and may require forward deployed expeditionary forces to remain in a theater or

geographic area longer than the four to five months that a MEU typically spends in a theater outside of recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. This would require MEUs to base the length of deployment on the needs of the GCC. This could mean deployment lengths of up to nine to twelve months or beyond. This increased time would also be a more efficient use of the extensive training capabilities these future MEUs would possess in order to be more well suited to meet the future needs of the GCCs (i.e. security cooperation).

In those theaters that required the execution of longer duration missions ashore (i.e. security cooperation), the associated forces would require functional support. In many cases, the footprint for this functional support would be best left on-board ship rather than ashore based on diplomatic and force protection reasons. Supporting forces in the littorals from the sea requires platforms, like amphibious ships, that have a proven record of accomplishment sustaining multi-mission (i.e. MAGTF) forces for extended periods. Amphibious ships, unlike other support ships (i.e. HSV, MSC shipping, MPF(F)), possess the command and control, well decks, helicopter capability, all weather capability, self-defense, etc to sustain missions ashore for extended periods.

In those theaters that do not require the execution of long duration missions, expeditionary naval forces could execute deployments along the more traditional model of a six-month deployment. In some cases, the length of the deployment and specific mission set required might call for a deployment of less than six months.

Task Organized, Trained, and Equipped Based on the Requirements of the GCC

Like the ARG, the organization and composition of the MEU has remained relatively unchanged. And like the ARG, this has largely been driven by the realities of resource

programming and personnel stability. If each theater and each GCC requires a combination of capability, some common with other GCCs and some unique, then it is reasonable to conclude that each MEU should be task organized to meet these needs. This is certainly a more expensive alternative to the cookie cutter approach of the past, but its cost may be more tolerable than the creation of new organizations like the GFS or SCMAGTF.

The efficacy of the MAGTF is not in question but changes to the sub-components of the MAGTF would likely have a profound impact on the relevance of future expeditionary forces. The current organization of the MEU command element would likely limit the future GCC's ability to operate in a distributed fashion across a theater. Several MEU commanders alluded to the fact that "the MEU is not normally structured and equipped to manage multiple maneuver elements simultaneously"²² from distributed locations. This limitation is less likely if the distributed forces are involved in operations that are more permissive like HA/DR and engagement tend to be. In instances where distributed forces are faced with operations in less permissive environs (i.e. raid, counterinsurgency, NEO, etc.) the future expeditionary force would require the ability to command and control multiple warfighting functional areas (i.e. maneuver, fires, aviation, etc.) across greater distances than called upon to do today. In addition, any increase in the size of the ARG would likely lead to an increased likelihood of distributed operations which would require more C2 capability.

Based on the GCC's demand for ISR tailored for distributed a environment, intelligence is a key functional area of future naval expeditionary forces to considered. Increasingly, intelligence is viewed by the GCC as the reason for operations as opposed to supporting operations. An increase in distributed operations, as discussed in regards to C2, would also require an increased intelligence capability compared to what the current MEU offers. With the increased likelihood

²² Bowditch and McGuckin, p.75.

of smaller scale contingencies, counterinsurgency, and counter terrorism operations, more counter-intelligence, signals intelligence, human intelligence and unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) capability would be required so the MEU could support its own distributed operations but also provide a more robust capability that feeds more directly into the GCC.

Future naval expeditionary forces operating in a theater more prone to security cooperation and smaller scale contingencies will require a unique mix of forces. While needing to retain the capabilities to respond to common mission sets like the NEO and HA/DR, forces designed to deal with more security cooperation could be weighted with the following capability sets: interagency coordination, training and advising local forces, engineering support, civil affairs, logistical support, heliborne and surface lift/mobility, medical. In these types of environments, the firepower that comes with the artillery battery, the armor platoon, and/or the AV-8B detachment might be better placed on MEU support ships embedded in the MPS. This type of theater could be supported by a two ship ARG.

In theaters where the likelihood of combat operations is more prevalent, and the requirement for security cooperation is also required, the assets normally associated with higher-end combat (i.e. tanks, artillery, fixed wing attack aircraft) could be retained. This type of theater could be supported by a three or four ship ARG.

In a theater where the likelihood of providing support to a counterinsurgency or conducting direct action operations is prevalent, future naval expeditionary forces will be required to conduct raids and support special operations forces as well as some of the capability sets associated with security cooperation. This would likely require expeditionary naval forces with more heliborne and surface lift as well as wheeled ground mobility in order to support forces ashore.

Conclusion

The recognition of a changing security environment is the genesis of both the GFS and SCMAGTF concepts. This view towards the future is commendable as the United States attempts to avoid unacceptable degrees of strategic or operational surprise. But as the naval expeditionary forces of the future are developed today's baby should not be thrown out with the bath water. The United States possesses a model for extending its influence across the globe in a dependable and persistent fashion known as the Marine Expeditionary Unit. It is from this model that the United States should begin to fashion its future capability. The MEU paradigm could be modified or broken without disregarding the MEU's strengths: training regimen, task organization, amphibious platforms, and cohesiveness with the Navy. These strengths should be built upon as the Navy and Marine Corps attempt to provide the GCC with the capabilities he requires.

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Appendix A: Glossary of Terms

Amphibious Operations – (JP 1-02) A military operation launched from the sea by an amphibious force, embarked in ships or craft with the primary purpose of introducing a landing force ashore to accomplish the assigned mission.

Amphibious Ready Group – (Wiki) An Amphibious Readiness Group, or (ARG) of the United States Navy consists of a Navy element—a group of ships known as an amphibious task force (ATF)—and a landing force (LF) of United States Marines (and occasionally, United States Army troops), in total about 5,000 people. Together, these elements and supporting units are trained, organized, and equipped to perform amphibious operations.

Distributed Operations – (DO Concept) The Distributed Operations concept envisions the deployment of units across a theater battle space to engage enemy forces. These units would be connected via command and control systems to carry out assigned missions, employ fire support assets, and request logistics support. If required, these teams would then coalesce into formally structured infantry units to employ conventional infantry skills. These units could then be employed in conventional combat operations or stability and security operations.

Marine Expeditionary Unit - (JP 1-02) A Marine air-ground task force that is constructed around an infantry battalion reinforced, a helicopter squadron reinforced, and a task-organized combat service support element. It normally fulfills Marine Corps forward seabased deployment requirements. The Marine expeditionary unit provides and immediate reaction capability for crisis response and is capable of limited combat operations. Also called MEU.

Maritime Special Purpose Missions – A task-organized force formed from elements of a Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable) and naval special warfare forces that can be quickly tailored to a specific mission. The maritime special purpose force can execute on short notice a wide variety of missions in a supporting, supported, or unilateral role. It focuses on operations in a maritime environment and is capable of operations in conjunction with or in support of special operations forces. The maritime special purpose force is integral to and directly relies upon the Marine expeditionary unit (special operations capable) for all combat and combat service support. Also called MSPF.

Appendix B: MEU Mission Essential Task List²³

1. *Amphibious assault.* The principal type of amphibious operation that involves establishing a force on a hostile or potentially hostile shore.
2. *Amphibious raid.* An amphibious operation involving swift incursion into or temporary occupation of an objective followed by a planned withdrawal.
3. *Amphibious demonstration.* An amphibious operation conducted for the purpose of deceiving the enemy by a show of force with the expectation of causing the enemy to take a course of action unfavorable to him.
4. *Amphibious withdrawal.* An amphibious operation involving the extraction of forces by sea in U.S. Navy ships or craft from a hostile or potentially hostile shore.
5. *Direct action operations.* Short-duration strikes and other small-scale offensive action to seize, destroy, capture, recover, or inflict damage on designated personnel or material. In the conduct of these operations, units may employ raid, ambush, or direct assault tactics; emplace mines and other munitions; conduct standoff attacks by fire from air, ground, or maritime platforms; provide terminal guidance for precision-guided munitions; conduct independent sabotage; and conduct anti-ship operations.
6. *Tactical recovery of aircraft and personnel (TRAP).* Rescue or extraction, by surface or air, of downed aircraft and/or personnel, equipment. Includes aircraft sanitization, and provision of advanced trauma life support in a benign or hostile environment.
7. *Security operations.* Protection of U.S. personnel and property (or those of a designated allied/friendly nation).
8. *Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR).* Assistance to relieve or reduce the results of natural or man-made disasters or other endemic conditions such as human pain, disease, hunger, or privation that might present a serious threat to life or that can result in great damage to or loss of property.
9. *Noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO).* Operations directed by the Department of State whereby noncombatants are evacuated from foreign countries to safe havens or to the United States, when their lives are endangered by war, civil unrest, or natural disaster.
10. *Peace operations.* Encompass peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations conducted in support of diplomatic efforts to establish and maintain peace.
11. *Provision of command, control, communications, and computers (C4).* Provision of an integrated system of doctrine, procedures, organizational structures, personnel, equipment, facilities, and communications designed to support a commander's exercise of command and control across the range of military operations.

²³ MCO 3120.9B

12. *Fire support planning, coordination, and control in a joint/combined environment.* Planning, coordination and control of fires from naval, air, and ground assets in support of U.S. and/or designated allied/friendly forces.
13. *Limited expeditionary airfield operations.* Tactical air operations from austere locations, including short-field, unimproved runways.
14. *Terminal guidance operations.* The guidance applied to a guided missile between midcourse guidance and arrival in the vicinity of the target. Electronic, mechanical, visual, or other assistance given an aircraft pilot or surface waves to facilitate arrival at, operation within or over, landing upon, or departure from an air/beach landing or airdrop facility.
15. *Enhanced urban operations.* Encompass advanced offensive closequarters battle techniques used on urban terrain conducted by units trained to a higher level than conventional infantry. Techniques include advanced breaching, selected target engagement, and dynamic assault techniques using organizational equipment and assets.
16. *Enabling operations.* Operations designed to facilitate the smooth transition of follow-on forces into the area of operations.
17. *Airfield/port seizure.* Securing of an airfield, port, or other key facility in order to support MAGTF missions, receive follow-on forces or enable the introduction of follow-on forces.
18. *Employment non-lethal weapons.* Operations planned with intent to minimize fatalities or permanent injuries and limit collateral damage by augmenting forces with non-lethal weapon systems.
19. *Tactical deception operations.* Actions executed to deliberately mislead the adversary's decision makers as to friendly forces' capabilities, intentions, and operations; thereby causing the adversary to take specific actions (or inactions) that will contribute to the accomplishment of the friendly mission.
20. *Information operations.* Actions taken to affect adversary's information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems.
21. *Intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance (ISR).* The collection, processing, integration, analysis, evaluation, and interpretation of available information concerning foreign countries, areas, and/or adversaries relative to the mission and area of interest.
22. *Antiterrorism.* Defensive measures used to reduce the vulnerability of individuals and property to terrorist acts, to include limited response and containment.
23. *Rapid-response planning process (R2P2).* The time-constrained planning process that allows the commencement of mission execution within six hours of receipt of a mission.